THE JULIET KEPES ARCHIVE

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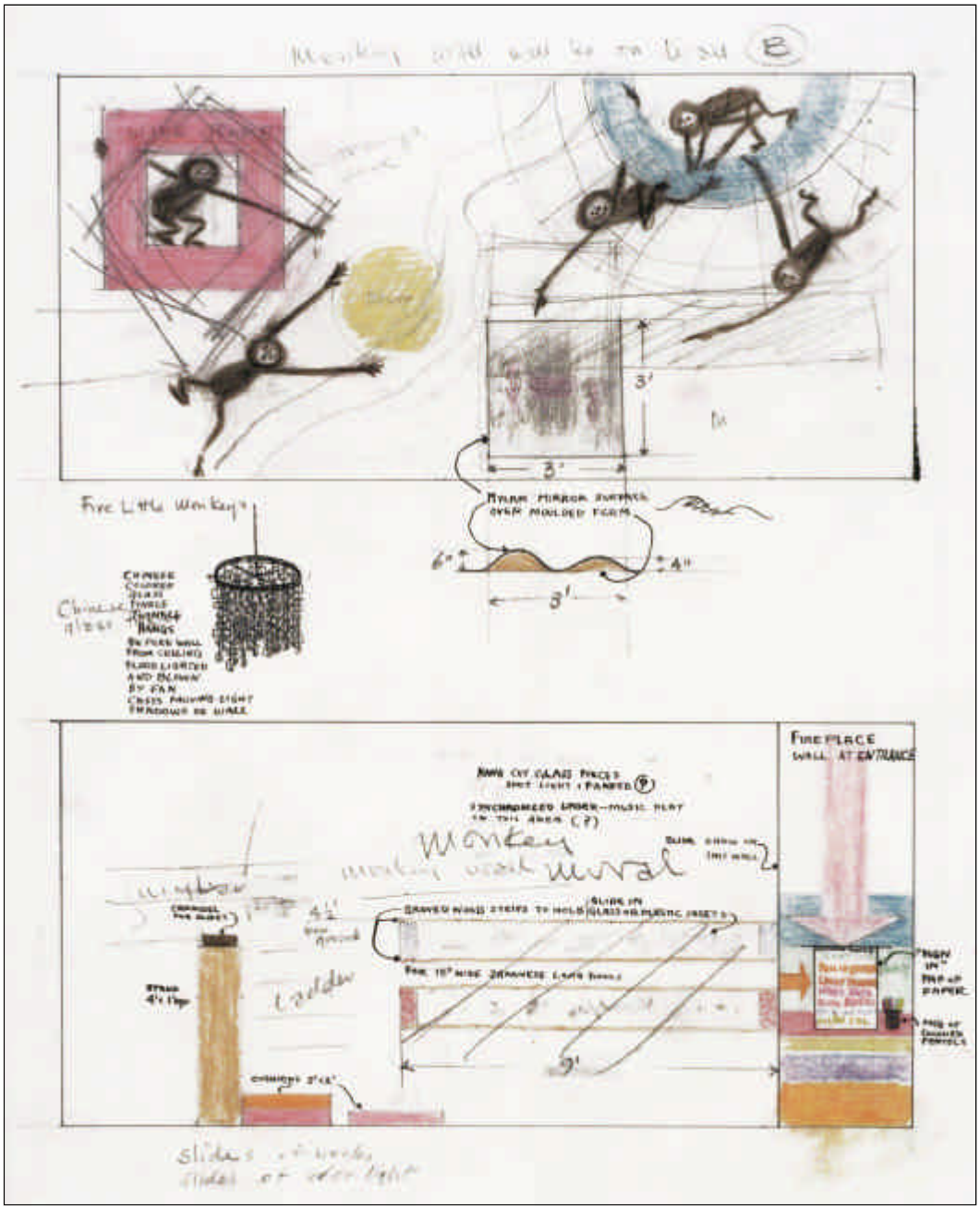
B
3'
3'
Five Little Monkeys
6"
4"
3'
FIREPLACE
WALL AT ENTRANCE
Monkey
mural
4½'
3'

THE JULIET KEPES ARCHIVE

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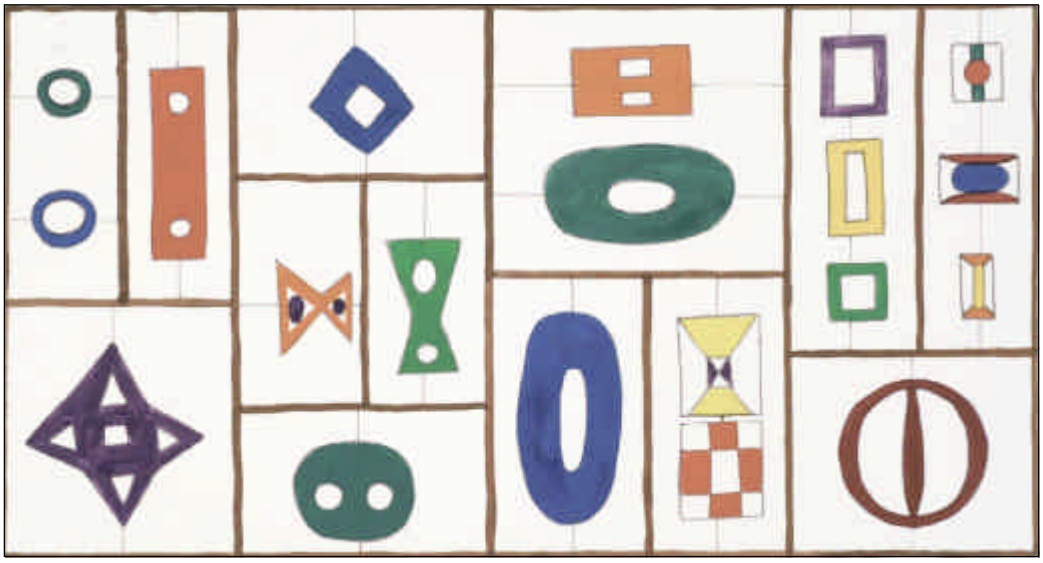
Cover: Lion M.A. Color serigraph, signed in pen, circa 1949.
Frontispiece: Environment for Children. Sketches for the project, circa 1977.

The distinguished and innovative artist, writer and illustrator, Juliet Appleby Kepes (1919-1999) is best known for the 17 children's books she wrote and illustrated, which won her a Caldecott Honor citation (for "Five Little Monkeys" in 1952) and other awards from the Museum of Modern Art, the American Institute of Graphic Artists, and the Society of Illustrators. The New York Times four times cited her books among the ten best children's books of the year. Her book "Birds" (1968) was published under the auspices of the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts of Harvard College Library, and introduced by its curator, Philip Hofer.

The British-born wife of Gyorgy Kepes, the influential artist and theorist, Juliet Kepes was trained at the Chicago Institute of Design (known then and now as the New Bauhaus), and worked as an artist in a number of fields relating to children, designing environmental spaces, murals, sculpture and textiles, among other things, sometimes in collaboration with her husband. Her work is featured in the Museum of Modern Art's show, "Century of the Child: Growing by Design, 1900-2000" (July-November 2012), in which the famous playroom environment she and Gyorgy Kepes designed for their daughter in 1949 was recreated at the Museum for this exhibition. Juliet Kepes's gouache drawing for the playroom mural was reproduced as a poster for the MOMA exhibition.

Juliet Kepes also collaborated with her husband on several architectural mural projects at Massachusetts schools and libraries, including schemes for the Morse School in Cambridge, the Fitchburg Children's Library, and the Wellesley Free Library (all commissioned by the architect Carl Koch); and the Taunton School (The Architects' Collaborative). As well she designed a series of bronze bird bas-reliefs for a Cambridge playground, commissioned by the municipal arts council (1980). Juliet Kepes was a Radcliffe Institute Scholar in 1970 and 1971.



The present archive includes more than 3,000 original drawings in various formats—ranging from quick occasional sketches to elaborately finished watercolors and finely painted sumi ink wash scrolls and albums—as well as extensive manuscript and typed texts for her books, both published and unpublished, and artwork relating to these from various stages of technical production. Also among the drawings are examples of her designs for holiday and greeting cards, some of which were published by the Museum of Modern Art and Design Research. In addition, the archive includes a variety of other creations, such as handmade puppets and painted wooden objects for children's rooms, bolts of textiles jointly designed by Juliet and Gyorgy Kepes, and examples of her original lithographs, etchings and silkscreens, all of which relate to her work as an illustrator. The archive also includes correspondence with editors, publishers, gallerists, and collaborators, as well as other professional files.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the Juliet Kepes Archive is the vast amount of material it contains—both of illustrations and of text—for books that were never published. These projects include some of her finest work, which, for various reasons of her own, and of her several publishers, were never completed or released. They include hundreds of manuscript drafts and annotated typescripts, together with an extraordinary wealth of artistic designs, worthy of study and, perhaps, eventual publication. Throughout, one sees the hard-won gestation of story after story, and scene after scene, as elements of language and narrative, imagery, and overarching conception are rethought and reworked. Some of the most sustained of these projects include "The Lamb in Wolf's Clothing," "Frogs & Rabbits," "The Lightning Brothers and Their Thunder Cousins," "A Beastly Bestiary," "Face to Face," and "Trala and Fala and Meedo."

Other aspects of the archive

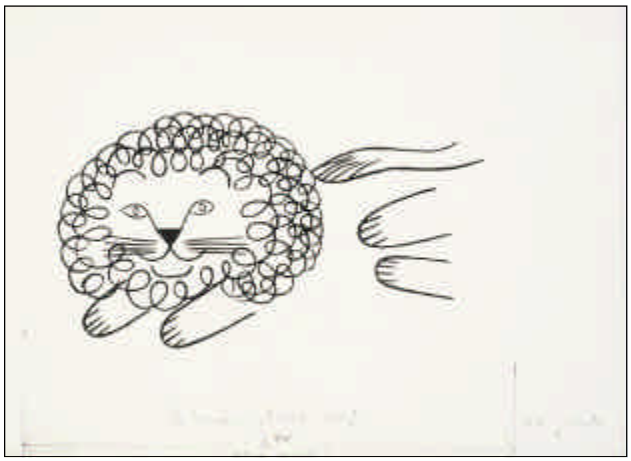
Drawings in the collection include examples of Juliet Kepes's early work, when at art school in Brighton and London, prior to her move to Chicago. The archive contains a selection of photographs of Juliet and Gyorgy Kepes; tributes and memorial letters written after her death; and catalogues, clippings, address books, slides, and other professional miscellanea. Among the few documents surviving from her time at the New Bauhaus are her 1938 letter of acceptance, and her 1942 diploma, both signed by Moholy-Nagy.

Correspondence in the archive

Editorial correspondence regarding her books with Atlantic Monthly Press, Houghton Mifflin, Little Brown, Pantheon/Random House/Alfred A. Knopf (substantial), and Walker & Company.
Correspondence with art galleries
Correspondence with museums, including the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston
and the Museum of Modern Art (Vincent D'Amico, Greta Daniel, Edgar Kaufmann Jr., Monroe Wheeler).
Other letters from Saul Bass, Charles Eames, Henry Dreyfuss, Philip Hofer, Katharine Kuh, Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, Robert Osborn, Walter Pach, Bernard Rudofsky, William Jay Smith, Benjamin Thompson, Richard Wilbur, Robert J. Wolff, et al.
A small but interesting group of early letters is included from Juliet Kepes to her husband, 1937 to 1945, with passing reference to the Spanish Civil War, the Moholy-Nagys, and the latest catalogue from Black Mountain College.

Further details on request. Price on application.

Selections from the Archive

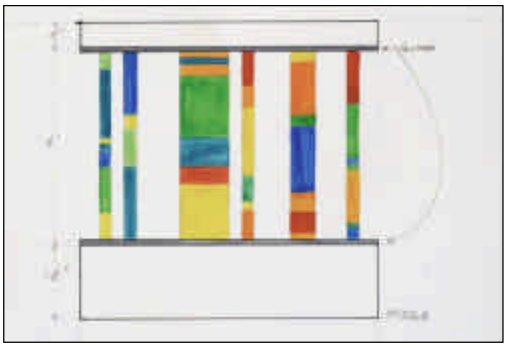


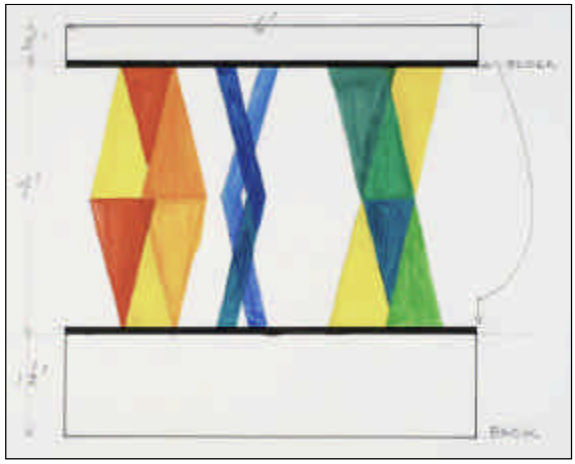
Lion M.A. Color silkscreen, signed in pen. Several states of this large-scale print (image size 14.5 x 20 inches) are included in the archive, printed on various papers. Closely corresponding to the lion rug in the Kepes's famous playroom/bedroom for their daughter, designed circa 1949, it evidently dates from that year. Correspondence in the archive from curators at the Museum of Modern Art indicates that it was already in their collection before March 1950. MOMA later published it as a Christmas card, offered in their 1962 catalogue.

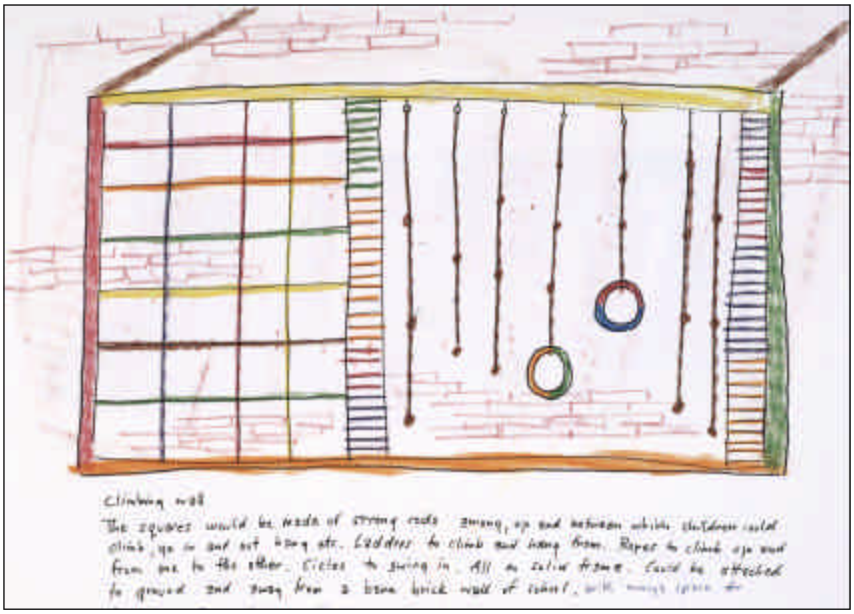
Lion. Pen and ink, annotated in pencil, on heavy wove stock, with annotated tracing-paper overlay with red paint sample. 11 x 14.5 inches. Circa 1949, this design too reprises the shaggy rag rug in the Kepes's daughter's playroom/bedroom, which was illustrated in a feature article on the room in "Life" magazine ("Fun Room. Child can climb and romp in her novel nursery," 22 August 1949). This drawing is indicated to have been made for reproduction in "Interiors" magazine, printed in red.

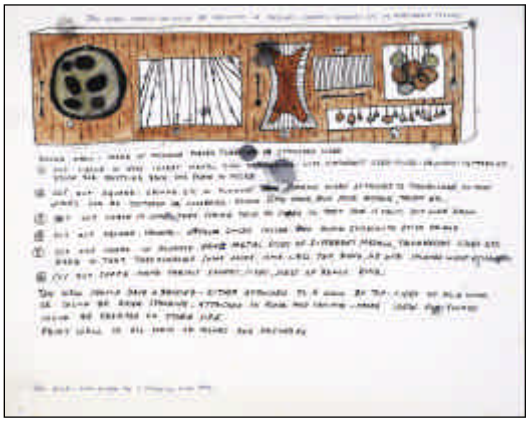
Clockwise, from top left:
Untitled Composition. This rare vintage photograph, inscribed "J. Kepes" on the verso, appears to document a composition from Juliet Kepes's years at the New Bauhaus in Chicago, beginning in 1937.
Textiles ("Fluctuation," "Gradation") designed by Juliet and Gyorgy Kepes, handprinted on linen by Laverne Originals (circa 1946?). Textiles by Juliet Kepes were exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art and the Newark Museum in 1946 and 1948.
Diploma from the School of Design in Chicago, awarded to Juliet Kepes in 1942, signed by László Moholy-Nagy and Gyorgy Kepes.
Correspondence regarding participation in the 1946 Museum of Modern Art Children's Holiday Fair of Modern Art, enclosing colored gelatins.

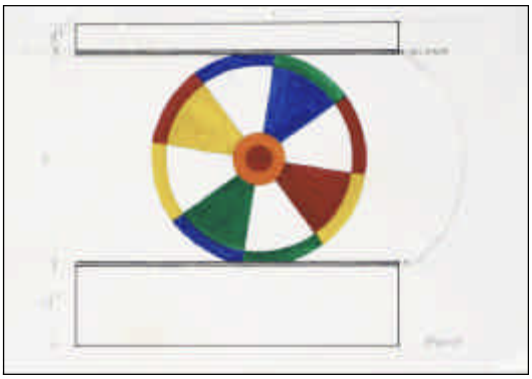
Ink Brush Drawings. Beginning in the 1960s, Juliet Kepes made sumi ink brush drawings in a range of formats, including traditional silk-bound Japanese albums and mounted scrolls, as well as individual sheets, some of considerable size. At far left, three drawings are shown from an album presented to her husband in 1967, "A Book of Birds," contemporary with her book "Birds," published in 1968 by the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts of Harvard College Library
The drawing at top right is one of group of drawings of different encounters between animals, provisionally titled "Face to Face." The scroll at left may also relate to this series.





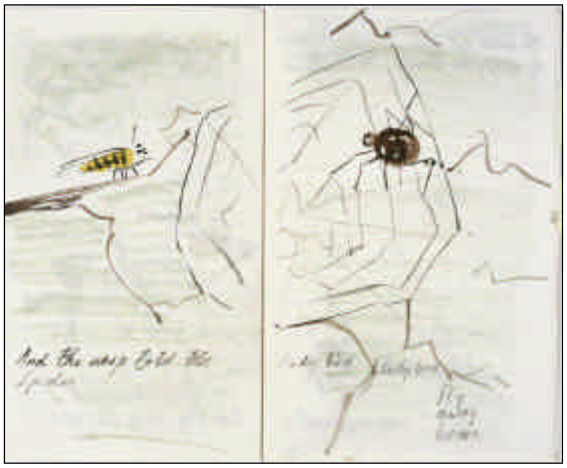

Climbing wall
The squares would be made of strong rods among, up and between which children could climb, go in and out hang etc. Ladders to climb and hang from. Ropes to climb up and from one to the other. Circles to swing in. All on solid frame. Could be attached to ground and away from a brick wall of school.

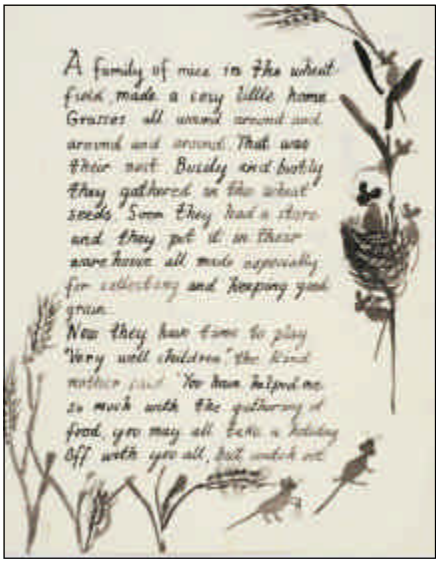


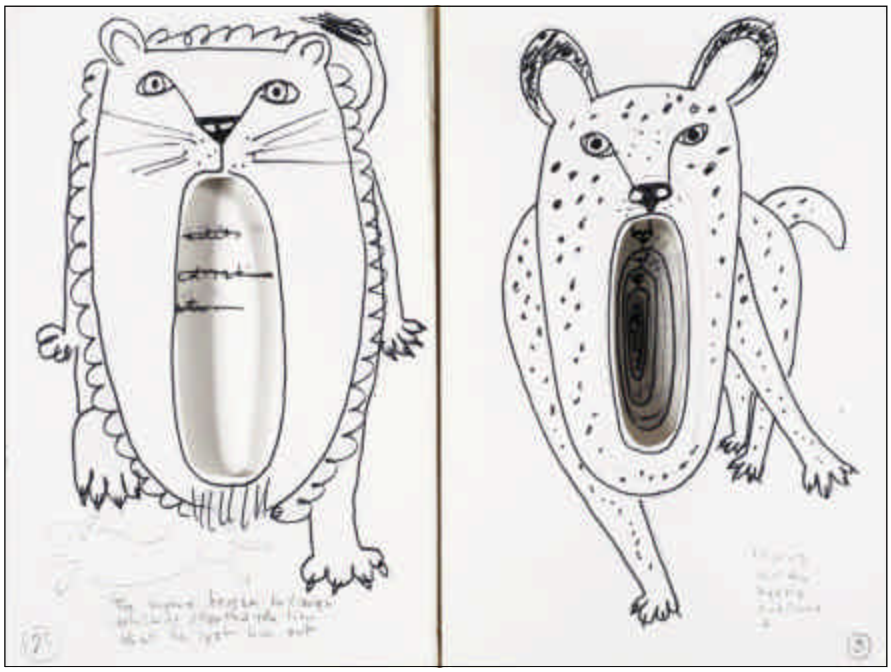


Environment for Children. Drawings and watercolors for this highly developed project include detailed plans and sketches, wall by wall, with studies of “sound wall,” a “color wall,” “ring of ribbons” blown by fans, chimes and bells, shadow play area (with projected images), puppets, and many other components, along with detailed plans for lighting and other technical elements. They were presumably made for Juliet Kepes’s solo exhibit of this title at the Robinson Galleries, Houston (1977).

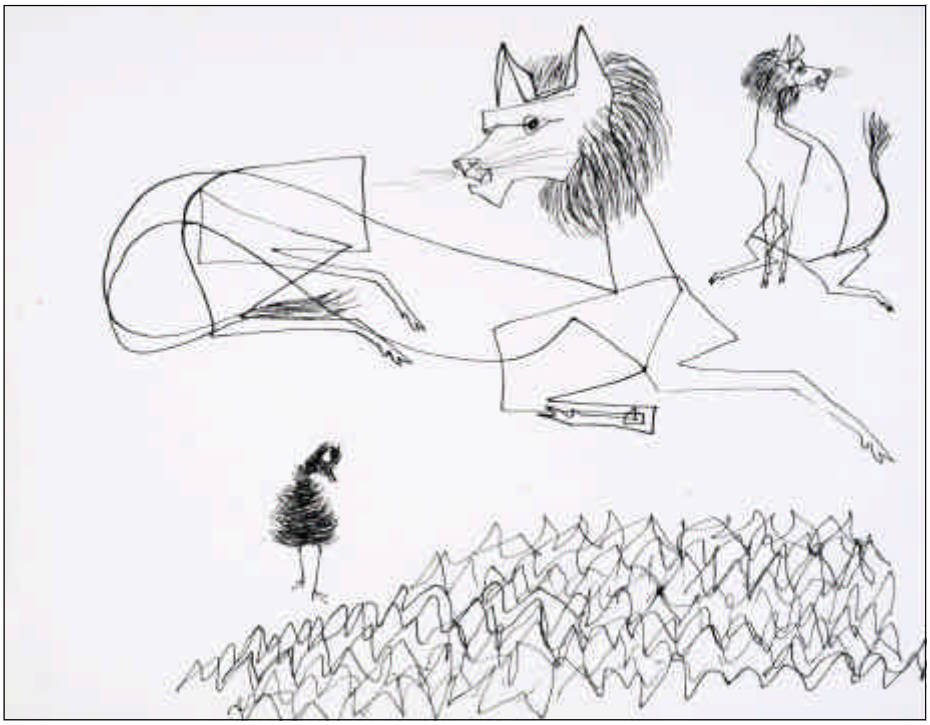
One of the dragon flies met a
striped bee — who
to each flower to hum to his
brother

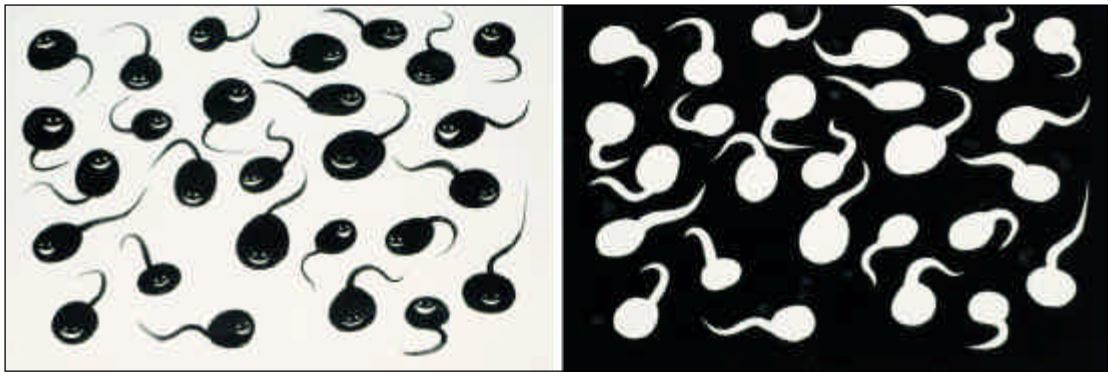

And the wasp told the
spider


A family of mice in the wheat
field made a cosy little home.
Grasses all around around and
around and around. That was
their nest. Busily and hastily
they gathered in the wheat
seeds. Soon they had a store
and they put it in their
warehouse all made especially
for collecting and keeping grain
grain.
Now they have time to play
"Very well children" the kind
mother said "You have helped me
so much with the gathering of
food, you may all take a holiday
Off with you all, but watch out

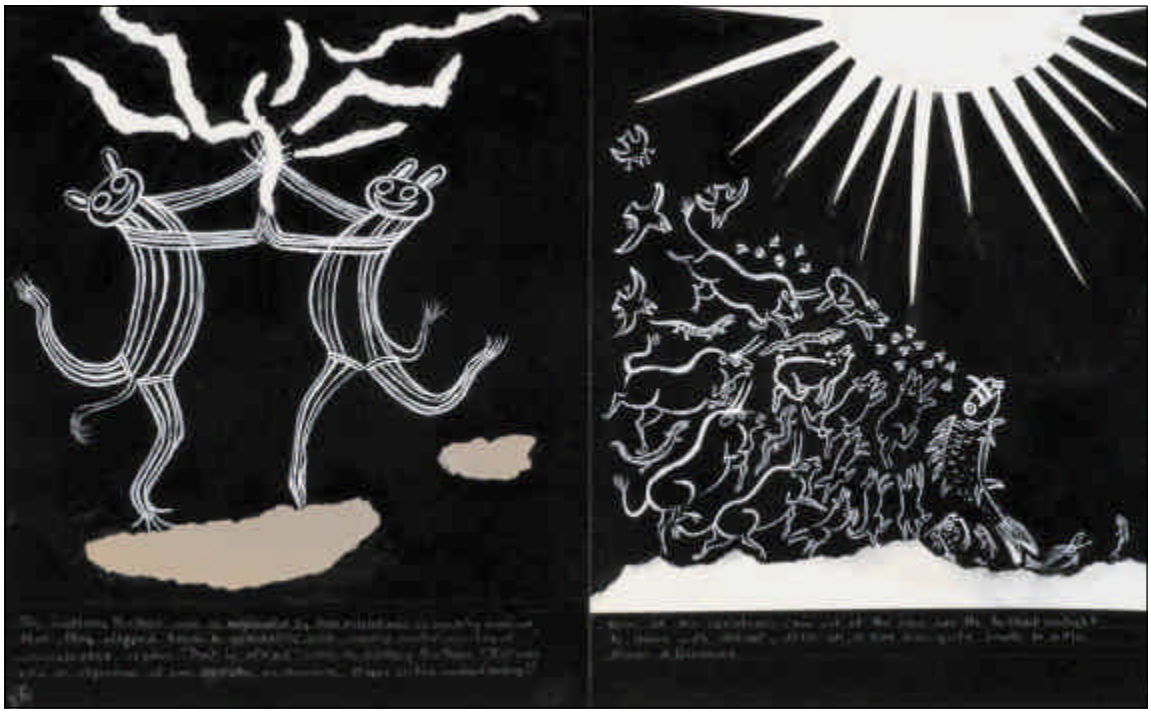


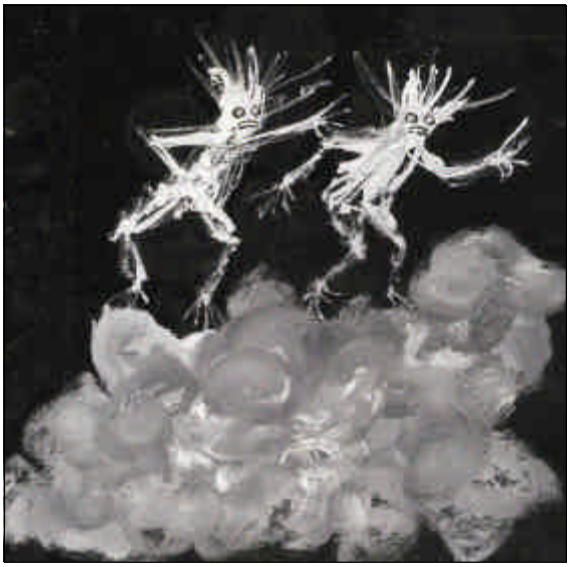
Book Maquettes. Examples of books in small formats, handmade by Juliet Kepes, some intended for personal use, others recording ideas for future work. That at top and center left relates directly to her book "Lady Bird Quickly" (1964). Those at right show her interest in transformation books, in which layers of design are revealed as the reader progresses.



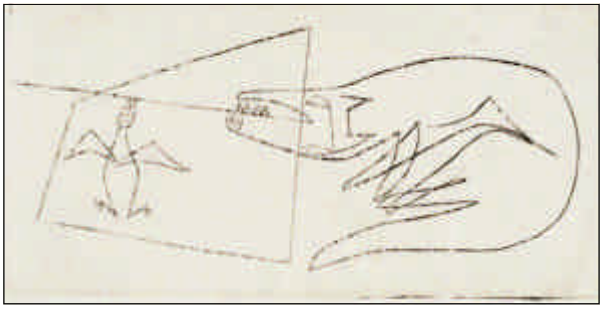


Correlations with Published Books. Above, a drawing close to those in "Beasts from a Brush" (1955); tadpole designs, that on the left used for the endpapers of "Frogs Merry" (1961). Opposite, a variant illustration for "Run, Little Monkeys! Run, Run, Run!" (1974). Below, sketches corresponding to the illustrations of "Two Little Birds and Three" (1961).





The Lightning Brothers. The archive includes a number versions of stories of one of Juliet Kepes's most original and fantastical creations, the Lightning Brothers. Sketches and manuscripts were extensively revised, but none ultimately reached published form.



Prints. Juliet Kepes's essays in printmaking included a number of large-scale lithographs, as well as distinctly small-scale etchings, nearly all of birds and animals. "Wary Bird," at top right, dates from 1968.

Books Written and Illustrated by Juliet Kepes

Five Little Monkeys. Boston (Houghton Mifflin), 1952.
Beasts from a Brush. New York (Pantheon), 1955.
Two Little Birds and Three. Boston (Houghton, Mifflin), 1960.
Frogs Merry. New York (Pantheon), 1961.
Lady Bird, Quickly. Boston (Atlantic, Little Brown), 1964.
Five Little Monkey Business. Boston (Houghton Mifflin), 1965.
The Seed That Peacock Planted. Boston (Atlantic, Little Brown), 1967.
Birds. New York (Walker & Co., in association with the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts, Harvard College Library), 1968.
Run, Little Monkeys! Run, Run, Run! New York (Pantheon), 1974
Cock-a-Doodle-Doo. New York (Pantheon), 1978.
The Story of a Bragging Duck. Boston (Houghton, Mifflin), 1983.

Books Illustrated by Juliet Kepes

McLeod, Emilie Warren. The Seven Remarkable Bears. Boston (Houghton, Mifflin), 1954.
Smith, William Jay. Laughing Time. Boston (Atlantic, Little Brown), 1955.
Read, Herbert (ed.). This Way, Delight. A book of poetry for the young. New York (Pantheon), 1956.
Miller, Mary Britton. Give a Guess. Poems. New York (Pantheon), 1957.
Smith, William Jay. Blue Boy's Book of Beasts. Boston (Atlantic, Little Brown), 1957.
Smith, William Jay. Puptents and Pebbles. A nonsense ABC. Boston (Atlantic, Little Brown), 1959.

Exhibitions

More than 25 solo exhibitions, including shows at the Baltimore Museum of Art (1952), the New York Public Library (1961), Radcliffe Institute Gallery (1971), Museum of Science Boston (1974).

Joint exhibitions with Gyorgy Kepes at the Currier Gallery of Art (1954), De Cordova Museum (1955), Worcester Art Museum (1958), and Institute of Contemporary Art Boston (1970), among others.

Numerous group exhibitions, including shows at the Art Institute of Chicago, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Corcoran Gallery of Art, M.I.T. Museum, and elsewhere.

Exhibits and competitions at the Museum of Modern Art New York:
Pictures for Children Competition, 1942 (award)
Arts in Therapy Competition, 1943 (award)
Children's Holiday Fair of Modern Art, 1946
Original Illustrations for Children's Books, 1946
Printed Textiles for the Home (1946?)
Circulating exhibitions "Competition for Printed Fabrics," 1947, 1948 and 1949 (award)
Circulating exhibition "Illustrations for Children's Books," 1948 and 1949

Collections

Baltimore Museum of Art
Houghton Library, Harvard University
Kerlan Collection, University of Minnesota (artwork, texts and production materials for various books)

Juliet Kepes. Five Little Monkeys. Oil painting, on stretched canvas. 72 x 24 inches. Circa 1970s. Reprising imagery from her first book (1952) and its successors.